United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

HABITAT MANAGEMENT (CSP Enhancements) March 2005

Enhancement Activity Task Sheet UT-MZ-CSP-EHM

Gunnison sage grouse by Ron Stewart, Utah DWR

Enhancement Activities

Enhancements activities refer to actions that provide resource benefits beyond the level prescribed by NRCS Conservation Practice Standards. Once implemented Enhancement Activities should result in an observable or measurable improvement to the condition of one or more of the soil, water, air, plant or animal resources, or provide for more efficient resource utilization and/or energy conservation.

Enhancement Activity Benefits

Enhancement activities associated with Habitat Management such as increasing the availability of food and cover for wildlife or improving the quality of water in your streams can result in the following benefits to the producer and the environment:

- Increased hunting and fishing opportunities
- Increased population of beneficial animals
- Increased wildlife viewing opportunities
- Reduced need to list species under the Endangered Species Act

CSP Payments

You can earn payments by improving the quality of the fish and/or wildlife habitat on your farm. Some of the factors used to determine the quality of fish and wildlife habitat include the following:

- Amount of grass, shrub and tree cover
- Distance to cover from your cropped fields
- Management of cover during the nesting season
- Availability of winter food and cover
- Composition and structure of cover

NRCS will base payments on implementation of the following enhancement activities:

- ❑ Optimize habitat values by enhancing the habitat structure in brush dominated areas (based on untreated acres)
- ❑ Improve wildlife food and cover by leaving unharvested crop or stubble > or = 8" over winter on cropland
- ❑ Improve wildlife food and cover by leaving unharvested hay or pasture > or = 8" over winter on hayland or pastureland
- ❑ Improve wildlife nesting cover by delaying haying until after July 15
- ❑ Improve wildlife nesting cover by using flush bars and/or beneficial mowing pattern during daylight hours
- ❑ Reduce habitat fragmentation by leaving strips of crop or hay unharvested on field borders (acreage based on 2-3 equipment widths)
- ❑ Improve fish and wildlife habitat by excluding livestock access on wetland or riparian areas (per acre excluded)
- ❑ Improve wildlife habitat by managing grazing to optimize structure and composition of the plant community
- ❑ Reduce habitat fragmentation by managing woody vegetation for wildlife on crop, hay, or pastureland (only on woody areas)

NRCS will help you assess the habitat needs on your property and must approve the design the selected practices prior to payment.

CSP Enhancements earnings are subject to payment caps. Your actual payment will depend on your CSP Tier level and the number of acres enrolled.

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Client's Acknowledgement Statement:

I have elected to use the following Habitat Management activities and understand the requirements of the selected activities (Check all that apply):

- ❑ Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (Worksheet 1)
- ❑ Sage Grouse Habitat Model (Worksheet 2)
- ❑ Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide for Crop, Hay, or Pastureland (Worksheet 3)

I agree that the following information will be provided to NRCS before this enhancement activity can be certified as applied:

- ➢ Written documentation of the fish or wildlife habitat improvements installed.
- ➢ Maps and photographs of fish or wildlife habitat improvements installed.
- ➢ Copies of dated receipts for material or services purchased.

I understand that CSP Enhancements earnings are subject to payment caps and that my actual payments will depend on my CSP Tier level and the number of acres enrolled.

I understand that it is my responsibility to obtain all necessary permits and to comply with all ordinances and laws pertaining to the application of these activities.

Accepted by: /s/ _____ Date: _____

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Certification by NRCS:

I have completed a review of the information provided by the client and certify this activity has been applied.

Activity	Name and Title	Date:

Stream Visual Assessment Protocol

Payment = $20/acre to exclude livestock access and grazing in riparian and/or wetland areas.

Your baseline score for Stream Visual Assessment Protocol is derived from a self assessment worksheet and verified by NRCS staff.

Baseline score for Stream Visual Assessment Protocol: _____

The actions required to raise your Stream Visual Assessment Protocol score vary with the landforms and resources found on your agricultural operation.

Name:

Worksheet 1 – Stream Visual Assessment Protocol

Streams and associated riparian and wetland areas

Managing livestock access to and grazing in riparian and wetland areas has been identified as an enhancement activity for CSP in Utah. The best riparian habitat conditions are often created by excluding livestock entirely. However, livestock can be used to control excessive or undesirable vegetation in riparian areas. The primary concern for riparian habitat is retaining and improving the native vegetation. This vegetation provides stability to banks, food and cover for wildlife, debris recruitment to the stream for fish food and cover, nesting places for birds, and corridors for wildlife to migrate or disperse to other habitat. Over time riparian trees age and die. Improper grazing scheduling in riparian areas results in no replacement trees being established. In addition, livestock access to the stream as a water source can lead to bank erosion and degradation of water quality. In the table below, please select the type of grazing management you are or will be using on the land enrolled in CSP. Enhancement payments will be paid on each acre excluded from grazing for the entire year.

Livestock Management in Riparian and/or Wetland Areas
❑ Use exclusion – Livestock seldom or never enter the wetlands and/or riparian area due to the presence of barriers. Barriers consist of either natural and/or artificial structures such as logs, earth-fill, boulders, or fences. Barriers must be adequate to prevent, restrict, or control use by targeted animals.
❑ Rotational grazing – Livestock access to wetlands and/or riparian areas is limited in duration, timing, frequency, and/or intensity. These limitations are documented in a Prescribed Grazing plan. Grazing access is typically allowed one year in three or less in the spring only.

Sage Grouse Habitat Model

Your baseline score for Sage Grouse Habitat Model as determined by NRCS_____.

Name:

Worksheet 2 – Sage Grouse Habitat Model

Gunnison sage grouse are a species of conservation concern in the Montezuma Watershed. The distribution of the species has declined and it now occurs only in parts of southeastern Utah and southwestern Colorado. Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation are major threats to the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, and the species is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Sage grouse are dependent upon sagebrush for nesting and thermal cover and most of their food, especially during the winter. Herbaceous cover is needed for nesting and brood rearing. The primary nesting period is April 1 – July 15. Forbs (wildflowers and weeds) mixed with grasses provide food as well as nesting cover. The woody and herbaceous cover types need to be close enough to each other that the birds can travel between them without being exposed to predators. Managing grazing and brush to optimize the composition and structure of the plant community are enhancements beneficial for sage grouse.

Habitat Enhancements	Payment
❑ Improve wildlife habitat by managing grazing to optimize the composition and structure of the plant community. Plans and specifications are to be prepared for each grazing unit and include wildlife habitat as a management objective. Specifications must follow the NRCS Utah Specification Sheet for Conservation Practice 528A. Information on Forage Production, Demand, and Balance will be included and used to plan a grazing system that specifies duration, timing, intensity, and frequency of use. Plans will be designed to increase the Range Similarity Index over time. In addition, plans will target sagebrush canopy cover at 10-35% of the planning area, average height of spring herbaceous cover to exceed 6", perennial grass canopy cover to exceed 10% of the planning area, forb canopy cover to exceed 5% of the planning area, and species richness to include 2 or more perennial grasses and 6 or more forbs.	$12.00/acre
❑ Optimize habitat values by enhancing the habitat structure in brush dominated areas (based on untreated acres) A mosaic pattern of brushy and herbaceous areas will be planned and mapped out before being applied on the landscape, keeping in mind the needs of the plants and plant communities. Consider the season of use by wildlife and livestock along with desired grazing habits and plants required by the species involved so that it will not create conflict between the different species. Sizes and locations of the treated areas should be planned with the assistance of an NRCS Biologist and/or Range Management Specialist. If herbicides are used, visit the NRCS office and ask for a WIN/PST evaluation tailored to the chemical/s to be used and your location, soils, and management system. (Attach Win/PST printout). If fire is to be used, a burn plan done by NRCS and/or Utah State Lands and Forestry must be obtained before starting (Attach Burn Plan). Herbicides are usually preferred over fire due to the control over the areas affected that can be applied.	$10.00/ untreated acre

Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide for Crop, Hay, and Pastureland

Your baseline score for Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide as determined by NRCS_____.

Name:

Worksheet 3 – Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide

Enhancements on cropland, hayland, and pastureland for wildlife center around providing food and cover during the winter months, nesting cover for ground-nesting birds during the breeding season and corridors of dense vegetation so that wildlife can move between areas of habitat without being exposed to predators. The following enhancements have been identified for use in the Montezuma Watershed. Please check those that you are or will be using on the land to be enrolled in CSP.

Habitat Enhancements	Payment
❑ Improve wildlife food and cover by leaving unharvested crop or stubble > or = 8" over winter on cropland. Unharvested crop or stubble should be located along edges of fields and next to adjacent habitat areas, if any.	$2/acre
❑ Improve wildlife food and cover by leaving unharvested hay or pasture > or = 8" over winter on hayland or pastureland. Unharvested crop or stubble should be located along edges of field and next to adjacent habitat areas, if any.	$40/acre
❑ Improve wildlife nesting cover by delaying haying until after July 15. This enhancement ensures hatching success of ground-nesting birds is not adversely affected by agricultural operations.	$100/acre
❑ Improve wildlife nesting cover by using flush bars on mower and/or beneficial mowing pattern on hayland. Hens of many game bird and waterfowl species tend to stick tight to the nest and resist the urge to flush when disturbed. This behavior evolved because it helps the nest avoid detection by predators. Flush bars can be home made devices mounted to the front of a mower that scare nesting birds off the nest. Alternatively, hay may be harvested starting in the center or along one edge of the field and mowing outward to flush birds toward the edges. Start mowing on the edge with highest disturbance and flush birds towards undisturbed vegetation when possible. The mower may still destroy eggs or chicks, but some adult birds will escape and have a chance to nest again. Do not mow at night, as this practice causes even higher mortality.	$5/acre
❑ Reduce habitat fragmentation by leaving strips of crop or hay unharvested on field borders (acreage based on 2-3 equipment widths) This can provide nesting cover for ground nesting birds during the breeding season, food, thermal cover during the winter months, and corridors to allow wildlife movement without exposure to predators. Use these borders to connect patches of natural vegetation.	$250/acre
❑ Reduce habitat fragmentation by managing woody vegetation for wildlife on crop, hay, or pastureland Fencerows or hedgerows provide nesting cover for birds during the breeding season, food, thermal cover during the winter months, and corridors to allow wildlife movement without exposure to predators. Native shrubs and/or trees provide the best food and cover benefits. Species that produce berries and those that have thorns are also very desirable. Use these borders to connect patches of natural vegetation.	$250/acre of woody vegetation